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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 001030

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TAGS: ELAB PREL PGOV EIND PHUM SOCI AR

SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: GOVERNMENT DISMAYED BY DOL LIST OF
GOODS PRODUCED BY CHILD LABOR AND FORCED LABOR

REF: A. STATE 92560

1B. BUENOS AIRES 0050

1C. BUENOS AIRES 0999

Classified By: CDA Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Argentine Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Victorio Taccetti convoked Charge d'Affaires on September 14 to convey the GOA's strong objection to the DOL List of Goods Produced by Forced and Child Labor. Taccetti complained that the extensive list of Argentine products on the list gave the impression of a country & among the worst⁸ in terms of child labor, despite Argentina's relatively positive labor regime, its commitment to addressing child labor, and its transparency in working with international partners. He said the report gave almost no real attention to Argentine reforms and efforts to prevent child labor. "This is a significant disincentive" for cooperation, North American Affairs Director Tony Trombetta added, referring to GOA cooperation with the USG and its support to NGOs on child and forced labor. Taccetti also said the report had made the GOA efforts to improve Argentine-U.S. ties more difficult. He singled out in particular the decision to go forward with a partial review of countries, pointing to the omissions of Chile, Mexico (on the Executive Order list for forced child labor), and "Europe" as particularly objectionable. CDA responded that he would forward the GOA concerns about the report to Washington, acknowledging that the partial listing of countries was problematic. CDA urged that Argentina continue its cooperation with the Embassy and international partners on trafficking in persons, child and forced labor.

¶2. (C) Separately, visiting WHA/BSC Director Drucker heard similar complaints from Director Trombetta during a meeting on September 11. Trombetta alleged that the report was "almost an invitation to a boycott," and that listing products rather than companies meant that companies with good practices could be penalized just as severely. Trombetta echoed the statement of the senior U.S. Desk Officer days before by saying that Argentina would not respond to criticisms leveled by individual foreign governments, but would respond only to appropriate international organizations. End Summary.

Initial Demarche: Reaction Poor

¶3. (SBU) Acting Political Counselor on September 9 provided the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs with advance notice of the Argentine listings under the September 10 DOL Report on Goods Produced with Child and Force Labor. The senior U.S. Desk Officer, Claudio Rojo, had arranged to have representatives of the multilateral human rights and the international women's issues offices present in the meeting.

¶4. (SBU) Rojo expressed disappointment that the USG continued

to issue "unilateral reports" and noted that these reports do nothing to inspire Argentina to do more to fight forced and child labor. He reiterated the MFA's request that we channel all information requests through the MFA instead of going to the various lead Ministries directly. When A/PolCouns noted the difficulties Embassy had had in obtaining information through the MFA in previous years, Rojo clarified Argentine policy saying Argentina only responds to multilateral requests for information, for example from the OAS or ILO. He said Argentine would not respond to unilateral requests for information.

On Reflection: More Agitated

¶15. (SBU) On the margins of a previously scheduled call by visiting WHA/BSC Director Drucker on the office of North American Affairs September 11, Deputy Director Maria Fernanda Canas told PolOff that her office had faced a real challenge in explaining the report within the ministry and in particular how it differed from USG reports on TIP and the Worst Forms of Child Labor. It was too much to absorb and extremely challenging for the bilateral relationship.

¶16. (SBU) North American Affairs Director Tony Trombetta called the report "almost an invitation to a boycott." "This could hurt all companies, whether their labor practices are poor or not," he said. Trombetta distinguished between past labor practices reports with "the appearance of a list" in this one, something he viewed as a political problem and something that would be seen by some as justifying punitive actions. The list was particularly objectionable given Argentina's generous approach to illegal immigrants from

South America, including official policies of affording all workers their rights and the protection of the state.

An Official Response: Not Pleased

¶17. (C) Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Victorio Taccetti convoked Charge d'Affaires on September 14 to receive the GOA's official response to the report. (Note: On September 11, at an event commemorating the September 11 terrorist attacks, Taccetti had told CDA that his government was upset by the report and likely to formally object. End Note).

¶18. (C) Taccetti said that Argentina objected to the partial listing of countries in the report, noting in particular the absence of Chile, Mexico (on the forced child labor Executive Order), and Europe from the list. The report was dismaying to a government that was working hard to improve bilateral relations (one that for example had recently worked closely with Chile and Brazil to prevent a condemnation of the U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement (reftel C). Argentina, he said, was among the most generous in Latin America in offering rights to workers and protections to foreign immigrants, including illegals, and for this reason such a report from the USG was particularly galling.

¶19. (C) Taccetti objected to the number of products listed for Argentina, reading them off one by one. He complained that whatever Argentina did to try to address U.S. concerns in its variety of admonitory reports, Argentina was always listed "among the bad, or in this case among the very worst" by the appearances of the list. "Our efforts are not recognized," he said, saying the report gave little attention to positive efforts by the GOA.

¶10. (C) CDA acknowledged the GOA concerns and promised to relay them to Washington. He noted that there was no link to trade in the report. He recognized the irony that Argentina received multiple listings in part because it protected the rights of investigative reports and active NGOs. Taccetti said that the report was not contributing to Argentina's interest in addressing such problems, while Trombetta, also in the meeting, went further: "All of our cooperation is thrown against us," he said; "it is an enormous

disincentive." The "finger-pointing" inherent in the report could seriously hurt a sector producing many jobs in Argentina, he said. CDA reiterated the importance of Argentina continuing to cooperate in addressing TIP, child and forced labor, agreeing that the Embassy would work to communicate information to Washington about its positive efforts.

Comment

¶11. (C) Argentina has grounds for complaint about the USG issuance of a partial report and a basis for its concerns about the impact on firms with good labor practices producing goods listed in the report. We suggested in reftel B that another admonition of this type would be unlikely to elicit a constructive response. The GOA has additional steps it needs to take to address serious shortcomings in preventing TIP and child labor, and Embassy will work exhaustively to encourage constructive actions and to support them where we can with advice or training.

KELLY